



# An entangled perspective on disability history: The disability protests in Argentina, Brazil and Spain, 1968-1982

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## "An entangled perspective on disability history: The disability protests in Argentina, Brazil and Spain, 1968- 1982".

Gildas Brégain

Twenty-four disabled people lock themselves inside the delegation office of the *Servicio de Recuperación y Rehabilitación de Minusválidos Físicos y Psíquicos* (SEREM) in Corogna (Spain) on 29th April 1976. They have multiple targets. They want to speed up the administrative procedure for their current demands, the service to be decentralized in order that they can take part in the local government of disability, as well as new ramps, adapted public transportation, and the strict application of measures to enable job accessibility for the disabled. They lock themselves inside for two days until the SEREM's director José Farre Morre comes to negotiate with them.<sup>1</sup> Some agreements are signed between administration and protesters that allow the fast implementation of accessibility measures at a municipal level.

This is not an isolated example. It shows that there are protest movements of disabled people outside Anglo-Saxon countries, which are generally considered the main sites that generate protest and emancipatory projects at an international level. Some American and English associations used diverse means of protest (demonstrations, sit-ins, bus chaining, etc.) during the 1970s in order to defend their rights. Sociologists Sharon Barnartt and Richard Scotch listed 97 protests initiated by disabled people and deaf people in the United States between 1970 and 1982.<sup>2</sup> The actions from the United States and from England share some common goals: the fight against charitable and paternalistic attitudes and discrimination, and the fight for access to self-determination and accessibility. However, mobilisations in the United States distinguish themselves by the way in which they defend a specific community organisation, that is, the centers for independent living founded on mutual aid and consumerism.<sup>3</sup> The English mobilizations distinguish themselves by the revendication of a social interpretation of disability (inspired by Marxism), by the UPIAS association.<sup>4</sup>

The protests by disabled people in Spain, Brazil, and Argentina have only been partially studied. Historian Lia Crespo has studied the demonstrations organized in several Brazilian cities during the annual day of protests by disabled people (21st September), established in 1982.<sup>5</sup> We have recently published an article that describes the protests of disabled people in Argentina in 1973.<sup>6</sup> In Spain, a recent book collects the testimonies of physically disabled activists about coordinated actions initiated in Barcelona. It focuses in particular on their sit-in at the SEREM office in Barcelona from 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1977 until 6th December.<sup>7</sup>

The period between 1973 and 1981 was identified by James Charlton as a crucial period for the disability rights movements at an international level.<sup>8</sup> We think it is necessary to extend this to at least the earlier date of 1968, identified by Michelle Zancarini as the time of a protesting trend at an international level, marked by politicization and aspiration to social change in several social sectors.<sup>9</sup> The chronology of this protesting decade varies from country to country, but it could be said to last

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<sup>1</sup> 'La Coruña: 20 minusválidos se encierran', *Empuje*, Barcelona, 6 (septiembre 1976).

<sup>2</sup> S. Barnartt and R. Scotch, *Disability protests: contentious politics. 1970 to 1999* (Washington: Gallaudet University Press, 2001), p. 140.

<sup>3</sup> P. Longmore, *Why I Burned my Book and Other Essays on Disability* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), pp. 111-114.

<sup>4</sup> T. Shakespeare, 'Disabled people's self-organisation: a new social movement?', *Disability, Handicap and Society*, 8:3 (1993), p. 250.

<sup>5</sup> L. Crespo, 'Da invisibilidade à construção da própria cidadania. Os obstáculos, as estratégias e as conquistas do movimento social das pessoas com deficiência no Brasil, através das histórias de vida de seus líderes (1979-2010)', (PhD dissertation, University of São Paulo, 2010), pp. 159-167.

<sup>6</sup> G. Brégain, 'Historiar los derechos a la rehabilitación integral de las personas con discapacidad en Argentina (1946-1974)', in L. Pantano (ed.), *Discapacidad e investigación. Aportes desde la práctica* (Buenos Aires: Educa, 2012), pp. 152-157.

<sup>7</sup> A. Guillén, 'La participación', in A. Vilà (ed.), *Cronica de una lucha por la igualdad. Apuntes para la historia del movimiento asociativo de las personas con discapacidad física y sensorial en Catalunya* (Barcelona: Fundació Institut Guttmann, 1994), pp. 64-66.

<sup>8</sup> J. Charlton, *Nothing About Us Without Us: Disability Oppression and Empowerment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 130.

<sup>9</sup> M. Zancarini-Fournel, *Le moment 68. Une histoire contestée* (Paris : Seuil, 2008), p. 223.

from the beginning of 1960 until 1981.

This decade is characterized by the significant promotion of the disability rights concept at an international level. It starts at the end of the 1960s when several NGOs (FIMITIC, ILSMH, ISRD) adopt a program of social claims, and ends with the UN's organization of the International Year for Disabled people in 1981, which also has consequences in 1982. These two factors - the political fervour and the promotion of the concept of rights - act as catalysts inside disability rights movements. In many countries they initiate the increase of a social culture of protest, the regular, large-scale use of protests inside the public sphere in order to defend their rights, and the building of new emancipatory utopias. The aspirations for the emancipation of disabled people that existed before 1968, now grew in size and became more radical during the decade 1968 to 1982. After this decade of protest, we note a period of temporary calm within movements that results in the decreasing use of protests or in their decreasingly subversive nature.

The radical mobilizations observed in each country possess their own singularity depending on different social, political, and cultural backgrounds. In order to determine their specificity, we are using the *histoire croisée* (entangled history) method within the comparative history approach, and address the need to study cultural transfers between countries and the historical variability of the studied categories.<sup>10</sup>

We are inspired by the work of American sociologists in characterizing the protests in terms of the following criteria: the actors and their political culture; the potential special-interest groups that support them; the manner in which they act; the level of conflict and of physical violence; the degree of subversion of the social order induced by these claims; the target of the protests; the degree of success and of institutionalization of these mobilizations. All these criteria allow us to differentiate these protests by their degree of radicalness. However, we did not apply the very advanced statistical methods used by the American sociologists. These methods are not relevant to our study due to the lack of statistical information about the ten Brazilian protests in question. We gave priority to a qualitative approach to our sources.

Examining the radicalness of these movements leads us to consider the moderation dynamics of the protests and actions. These can be generated by pressure from the political and religious authorities or they can result from the confrontation between the demands of the different actors involved. Unlike the situation in the United States, in which the evolution of the protesting activity was related to outstanding issues of national disability policy, the temporality of the protests inside the three countries we study seems to be influenced much more by the presence of dictatorships in Spain (until 1975), in Argentina (1966-1973 and 1976-1983), and in Brazil (until 1985).

The analysis of the transfer of ideas and of organizational forms between national settings allows us to better understand these political mobilizations. The Ibero-American area is a very interesting space in which to observe the degree of circulation of the emancipatory projects and the organizational forms inspired by the Anglo-Saxon countries, as information about disability has travelled between American countries and Europe since the end of the 19th century.

The consultation of sources leads us to study the protests mobilized for disability rights, even if they were carried out by the physically disabled, the blind, the deaf, people with intellectual impairments, or their families. Some mobilizations are marked by the joint presence of several actors. This diversity shows the current re-composition of distinct categories (blind, deaf, disabled, intellectual impairment) towards a single global category. We are mainly referring to the respective disability associations' magazines, but we also draw on the official and alternative press, as well as interviews with associations' activists of that time.

It is necessary to outline first the conditions of possibility that explain the transition from a respectful attitude towards authorities to a public blame of the political leaders' responsibility, before, second, comparing the radical forms of action, and, third, the stakes of these protests.

## **1. From the experience of discrimination to its interpretation as a political problem.**

### **A. The rise of feelings of injustice.**

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<sup>10</sup> M. Werner and B. Zimmermann, 'Penser l'histoire croisée : entre empirie et réflexivité', *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 1 (2003), 15, pp. 6-37.

During the decade from 1968 onwards, the notion of disability rights is present in most discourses used by NGOs and international institutions. This declaration of commitment to rights touches those most affected and their families and creates – or rather consolidates – new aspirations within them. The comparison between the discrimination they currently suffer and what they consider they can now obtain gives them a feeling of injustice. This feeling of injustice is even greater among those disabled people who have already been through a process of professional rehabilitation over a long period of time but who did not succeed in joining the mainstream labour market, contrary to what professionals might have promised them.

Sources from the campaigning associations show the existence of many expressions of dissatisfaction, or even protesting against authorities, beginning in 1967-1968 in Argentina and in Spain, and in 1977 in Brazil. In Spain, in 1968, one of the leaders of National Association of Invalid Civilians in Zaragoza, Gregorio Sierra, testifies about his exasperation in the face of the lack of both job opportunities and of specialized schools for the disabled:

There are some moments when you feel close to rebellion. To rise against the social indifference... We had thought... that the social justice would arrive, the one that regards all people as equals. That the physical impairment had precisely a potential degree of preference, by finally giving compensation rights for invalidity. But positively effective. No mercy, no preached charity from a circular balcony directed to the four winds.<sup>11</sup>

But the context of Franco's dictatorship does not allow the people to express this dissatisfaction publicly through protests. It was only when dictatorship ended that political opportunities allowed some groups to claim their right to be respected in public space.

## **B. The association's part in the politicization of disabled people.**

The entangled study of the part played by an international association in the politicization of disabled people brings a great deal of clarity. The *fraternité catholique des malades* is born in France in 1942 under the impulsion of the priest Henri François. It is a movement formed of ill people evangelizing, and is open to everyone from any religion and to atheists. Directed by ill people themselves, priests and laymen, the association is guided by the idea that ill people should 'liberate themselves from the paternalism of some people in good health, inclined to consider them as assisted people'.<sup>12</sup> Each group of the fraternity is assisted by a chaplain, usually one who is also ill. The association centers its actions on the regular organization of group meetings, in which spiritual exercises mix with discussions about ordinary topics and with convivial moments during breaks.

This associative movement spreads quickly to other countries. In spite of the fact that all the groups in the fraternity share the same founding principles, each group maintains its autonomy. On a local level, the chaplain of each fraternity group plays a fundamental part in orienting the activities. He often decides on the respective time and attention given to spiritual exercises, recreational activities, and militant activities. This leads to a strong heterogeneity of the fraternities inside each country and between countries. From the end of 1960s, some groups of the fraternity begin to interpret the founding principles starting in terms of a progressive religious culture (a social doctrine of the Church, a theology of liberation). This empowers them to publicly claim their rights. At the end of the 1970s, the international coordination of the fraternity encourages the groups from each country to suggest legislation to the public authorities in order to fight for disability rights.

The movement establishes itself inside the province of Barcelona in 1957, under the name *Hermandad Catolica de Enfermos*. The discussions of most provincial groups focus on spiritual reflection on God's message. However, some of the groups of the fraternity move towards a more progressive line during the mid-1970s, by following the social doctrine of Vatican II council. Then, they start to discuss their rights during meetings and to fight for them in peaceful street protests.

In 1972, a Spanish Jesuit, Vicente Masip founds several groups of the fraternity in the rich region of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. In accordance with what he observes in Peru, this priest keeps an exclusively spiritual orientation to these groups during the first few years. Travelling through other regions of Brazil and other Latin-American countries make him gradually more sensitive towards the

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<sup>11</sup> G. Sierra, "¿ Se hará justicia?", *Boletín Informativo ANIC*, Delegación de Zaragoza, 36 (noviembre de 1968).

<sup>12</sup> T. D'Argenlieu, *La fraternité catholique des malades* (Bourges: Les éditions du cerf, 1953), p. 28.

religious diversity and the very unequal economic reality he observes.<sup>13</sup> After meeting many priests committed to the theology of liberation, in 1979 he also converts to this ideology and modifies the orientation of the fraternity's action. In doing so, he draws in particular on the conclusions of the conference of the Latin-American Episcopal Council from Puebla. In 1979, he declares that the *Fraternidade Cristã de Doentes* (FCD) is from then on 'a group committed and concerned with the marginalization of ill persons, wishing to participate in the liberation process of the poor people of Brazil'.<sup>14</sup> In 1981, the Brazilian fraternity is made up of about a hundred groups scattered all over the different states. The large majority of them adopt the theology of liberation. By comparing the struggle of disabled people with that of the minority marginalized by an unfair economic and political system, the fraternity leaders declare their solidarity with other marginalized communities (black people, workers, women, homosexuals). Unlike the Spanish fraternity, which only welcomes Catholic people, the Brazilian one is rather ecumenical.

In Argentina, the fraternity movement begins independently at the beginning of 1973. After reading a small booklet written by Manuel Duato, the first assessor of the fraternity in Peru, several ill persons organize their own group of the fraternity in the capital city.<sup>15</sup> By the end of the 1970s there are six groups of the fraternity in the whole country. Their activity is mainly spiritual. The rights of disabled people are never mentioned in meetings during the dictatorship period, as the association is led by an ultra-conservative auxiliary bishop. Disabled people interpret their experience during their discussions only through the Gospel's eye; they wish to know whether their impairment is a gift from God rather than a punishment.

Although cultural transfers occur between the Brazilian and Argentinian fraternities, they do not manage to modify the orientation of one another's fraternities. The differences in orientation between the fraternities of these three countries mean that they have a varying involvement with disability rights movements and with the radical mobilizations enacted to fight for these rights. The Brazilian fraternity is strongly committed to the demonstrations, whereas the Argentinian one is not. Only a few groups of the Spanish fraternity take part in the protests in Murcia, Seville, and Madrid.

The Church plays an ambivalent role inside the disability rights movement. In spite of the fact that it systematically puts disabled people under a new (religious) supervision, the Church is rarely seen as a socially conservative organization. The Church, if it adopts a progressive line, can become a vehicle for disabled people's emancipation. However, when religious groups fight for disability rights, they are usually reluctant to blame the charity, which they compare to a kind of fraternity. They prefer to talk about a 'thoughtful charity'. It retains some of the religious and social functions of the charity, but gives up the alms (and its corollary, the maintaining of the individual's social status) and fights for the individual's right to professional rehabilitation (and therefore to a potential social ascent).

### **C. The political interpretations of the social marginalization of disabled people.**

In the context of the Cold War, the different political utopias of social justice and equality (Marxism, theology of liberation, New-Left, Anarchism) exert different influences on disability rights movements. The decade of the 1970s is characterized by the expansion at the international level of the New Left, which questions the Communist Party orientations, partly aligned with the position of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, as well as the increasing trend for the theology of liberation within the Catholic Church in some South American countries. This trend, which decides to fight with poor people in order to claim a better wealth distribution across the continent, very soon becomes dominant in Brazil, but is followed only by a minority inside the Argentinian Catholic hierarchy.<sup>16</sup>

There are many disability rights movements, such as the associations, which make up these movements and have various ideological influences. A large number of these associations declare themselves to have no party affiliation, due to the fact that their members are socially and politically heterogeneous. However, some groups follow a well-established ideological line, which is promoted by their leaders. In Spain, the association *minusvalidos unidos* from Madrid proudly shows its

<sup>13</sup> Archives of the Fraternidade Cristã de Doentes e Deficientes, Porto Alegre, letter, Vicente Masip to Carmen, 1975.

<sup>14</sup> V. Masip, 'Uma nova criação', *Cartas Abertas*, Recife, 27 (1979).

<sup>15</sup> *Quitapenas*, San Martín, 2 (marzo 1980).

<sup>16</sup> F. Devoto y B. Fausto, *Argentina-Brasil, 1850-2000, un ensayo de historia comparada* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2008), p. 417.

communist affiliation during the protests, by displaying a banner with the icon of the hammer and the sickle. Some groups from *Auxilia* and from *Fraternité* identify themselves with the social doctrine of the Church of the Vatican II Council. In Argentina, the majority of members of *Frente de Lisiados Peronistas* (FLP) join the Marxist trend of Peronism. In Brazil, most activists and assessor priests from FCD subscribe to the theology of liberation that emerged from 1979 onwards.

In Spain, as in Argentina, some associations have a Marxist interpretation of the job discrimination they are suffering from. In Buenos Aires, leaders of FLP organize a protest on 24th July 1973 in order to fight against the work exploitation they experience inside the sheltered workshops managed by the *Asociación de Orientación y Ayuda al Invalido* (AOI) and by the *Coordinación de Obras de Rehabilitación* (COR), which give them a meagre salary.<sup>17</sup>

In Spain, leaders of the association *minusvalidos unidos* (MU) from Madrid also understand their marginalization through the prism of Marxism. In the open letter they send to different news magazines and newspapers in September 1975, they denounce the educational and job marginalization that the capitalist society is imposing on them.<sup>18</sup> One of the founding members writes a few years later that it is the private ownership of the means of production that stops the integration of disabled people into the labour market and, therefore, society, because it doesn't offer them the necessary technical and human resources that would allow them to work. The member argues that although the scientific and technical progress of the industrial revolution allows disabled people to do some of the same tasks as other people, in a capitalist society, 'the disabled person is damaged merchandise which is not interesting to hire and which you can buy in any case at sale price'<sup>19</sup>. So the marginalization of disabled people lies in the capitalist economic structuring of society, which tries to cover the exploitation of the human being by the human being through a Catholic paternalistic ideology. By considering the disabled people as being an exploited social class, in the article the member advocates solidarity with other exploited classes.

On 1st November 1976, several groups from Andalusia, Galicia, Aragon, Leon, and Catalonia adopt the charter of demands of MU and declare themselves victims of the capitalist economic system. However, by broadening the movement to other associations, these radical interpretations clash with other interpretations and they quickly become marginal. In fact, a large number of deeply believing activists from other associations understand their marginalization to be the result of the lack of sensibility and collaboration of the political authorities (low budget or bad money management, over-centralization, lack of appropriate legislation).<sup>20</sup> This no-party, but democratic and conservative, political interpretation of the established capitalist system prevails inside the Spanish movements for the rights of the physically disabled.

## 2. The radicalness of the movements and their limits.

We have provided a review of the protests that are mentioned by our sources, but this cannot be exhaustive. We have included the road protests, the hunger strikes, the sit-ins, as well as alternative protests (public concentration, chaining, interruption of a public cultural event, etc.). The main limitation of this review is that the fight for disability rights may occur in the form of more general street protests made by trade unions or political parties. We do not account for these. The FLP in Buenos Aires and the MU in Madrid regularly participate in the protests organized by the political parties they had previously joined.

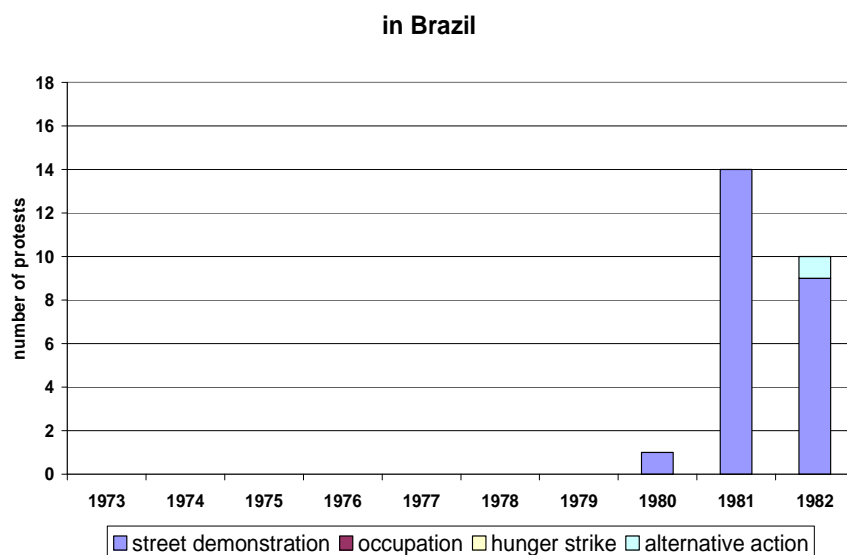
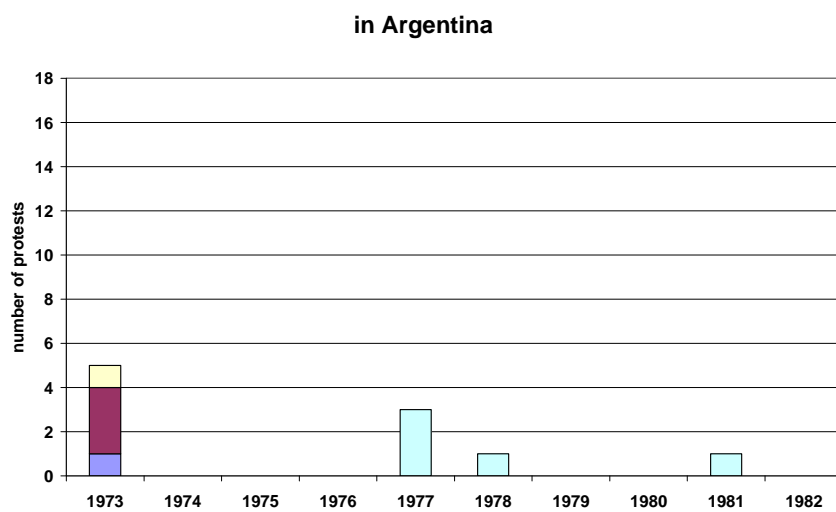
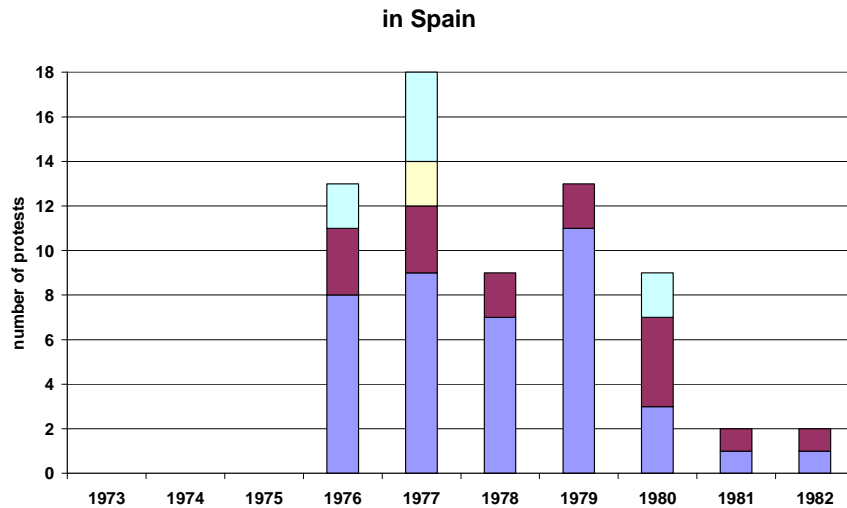
### Protests to fight for the rights of Disabled People (1973-1982)

<sup>17</sup> 'Saquen a los lisiados de allí', *El Descamisado*, Buenos Aires, 11 (31 de julio de 1973).

<sup>18</sup> *Auxilia*, Madrid (noviembre-diciembre 1975).

<sup>19</sup> Gabinete de Estudios y Asesoramiento, *Minusvalidos Fisicos. Marginación y Oposición* (Madrid: Grafiprint, 1979), p. 11.

<sup>20</sup> 'Sociología. Influencias ambientales y sociales en la disminución física', *Auxilia*, Madrid (nov-dic 1976).



### A. Violence and repression. The weight of political control.

The possibility to organize radical actions widely depends on the political context and the degree of public liberty that exists in a country. The various paths taken by the political systems we are studying lead to clear differences in the temporality of the disability protests. The first mobilizations

start in Argentina at the end of May 1973, when Hector Campora and Juan Perón come to power. This brings an enormous hope of justice and of reversal of the capitalist economic order to a part of the population. A similar shift happens in Spain during the second quarter of 1976, at the moment of the democratic transition following Franco's death; and in Brazil after 1979, with the slow, progressive, and non-linear democratization of the dictatorial regime. In Spain, the very opposing political cultures in Madrid and Barcelona probably explain the early and frequent actions carried out after the dictator's death.<sup>21</sup> In Spain and in Brazil, owing to the process of democratization, the radical protests continue until 1982, and even beyond this in Brazil, although some radicalness is lost through institutionalization. On the contrary, in Argentina, the protests considerably reduce their number and intensity from 1974 onward because of the political closeness of Perón's regime and the establishment of the dictatorship in 1976. In 1982, while the Argentinian dictatorship is still powerful and oppresses all social movements, Spain has almost completed its democratic transition.

Between the three countries, Spain distinguishes itself by the important number of protests that take place between 1976 and 1982 (66). The majority are street protests (40) with a significant number of sit-ins inside administrative and religious buildings also taking place (16). We could only count ten radical actions in Argentina during the decade, and 25 in Brazil. If we measure the protest's intensity in the light of the number of inhabitants of these countries during the mid-1970s (26 million in Argentina; 110 million in Brazil; 35 million in Spain; 212 million in the United States), the level of contestation is much more intense in Spain than in the other countries, include the United States.

The Brazilian protests are limited to only one type of action, the street protest. They are more various in Spain and in Argentina where the physically and sensorily disabled people are active in occupations of spaces (3 in Argentina), and hunger strikes (2 in Spain, 1 in Argentina). In Barcelona, several activists also chain themselves to lampposts from *Ramblas*, and they also interrupt a theater performance. The level of radicalness of the disabled people's actions must be understood within the framework of initiatives existing in those countries at that time. On the one hand, the unusual actions taken by the disabled people in Argentina (1973) and Spain (1976- 1981) are actually similar to those used by other social groups at the same time, a period of social turmoil. On the other hand, the existence of public concentrations during the Argentinian dictatorship is quite remarkable. Their organizers may experience a high level of danger.

The presence of dictatorial regimes strongly influences the range of means available to civil society actors. In Spain, there is no radical action during Franco's dictatorship. There are no sit-ins and no hunger strikes during the Brazilian and the Argentinian dictatorships. The street protests organized in Brazil and the public concentrations organized in Argentina in this period are seldom subversive. In Argentina, in spite of this highly repressive context, about thirty blind street vendors organize several public demonstrations in 1977 and 1978 in front of the offices of the public authorities responsible for issuing street vending permits. They demand their right to maintain their work areas, as the town council refuses to renew their permits. According to Tania Garcia, a blind member and one of the main leaders of the group, they gained an interview with Colonel Orobio, the mayor's government secretary, who 'told us that we could not work anymore, and when we reminded him we had families, children and we had to earn money in order to live and meet the needs of our families, he offered us asylums!'.<sup>22</sup> Their movement is monitored continuously, but they are not subjected to physical violence or imprisonment during their actions. On 8th August 1981, a group of physically disabled people make a peaceful concentration in front of a portside warehouse in Buenos Aires in order to protest against the delay in enacting a law that will exempt them from paying any taxes on imported cars with orthopedic adjustments.<sup>23</sup> They wish to pick up their adapted cars as quickly as possible from the customs office without paying any import taxes. Their peaceful gathering surprises the authorities, but the absence of subversive claims avoids them being punished.

In Brazil, the military authorities do not find the protests of disabled people to be subversive. The employees from the prosecution authority, the DEOPS, can be found among the protestors, but

<sup>21</sup> M. Pérez Ledesma, 'Nuevos y viejos movimientos sociales en la transición', in M. Carme (ed.), *La Transición, treinta años después. De la dictadura a la instauración y consolidación de la democracia* (Barcelona: Península, 2006), p. 128.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Tania Garcia, Buenos Aires, March 17th 2010.

<sup>23</sup> 'Discapacitados no pueden retirar autos del puerto', *La Nación*, Buenos Aires (9 de agosto 1981).



they do not feel any need to write reports about it. Only two articles from the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo* that refer to the protests of the disabled people are found in the archives of DEOPS.<sup>24</sup> Even though they include many claims, these actions take place mainly within the framework of the International Year for Disabled People (1981), which gives them a special legitimacy. The authorities allow all the protests requested by the associations. Police forces never use physical violence against participants.

The degree of repression of these protests is, paradoxically, more important during the Spanish democratic transition. The physically and sensorily disabled are often refused the right to protest and the activists often face violence at the hands of police forces, who break up demonstrations and expel some local administrative or religious authorities. Such physical violence is common towards physically and sensorily disabled people, but exceptionally it is also directed at a protest for the rights of people with intellectual disabilities. At the beginning of June 1977, hundreds of parents with their intellectually disabled children protest in Las Palmas in order to claim their children's rights to special education. Police quickly arrive in order to stop the protest using very violent means, even towards those with intellectual disabilities.<sup>25</sup>

Protests by blind people, critical of the National Organization of Spanish blind people (ONCE), are systematically hampered, and occupiers of ONCE's spaces are expelled by police immediately. This fast intervention by police forces illustrates ONCE's pressure on Spanish authorities and also the important political control it has on the blind people who are required to join it. Unable to protest as a group, some young blind people act individually by using their body as a tool with which to protest. One of them covers his white shirt with many slogans, such as 'I am banished by ONCE'.<sup>26</sup>

In Argentina, the spontaneous demonstration by the FLP on 24th July 1973 ends with altercations with firemen and a few police officers, but nobody was injured. It seems that the other actions take place without violent conflicts with police. The dictatorship that begins in March 1976 sets up a very repressive system towards all those persons it sees as subversive. Some disabled activists will be victims of this. Between October 1976 and December 1978, several older leaders of FLP, now members of *Cristianos para la Liberación*, are imprisoned and tortured.<sup>27</sup> Claudia Inès Grumberg and José Poblete Roa do not survive their captivity.

## **B. The dynamics of moderation of the involved groups. The weight of strategies.**

Apart from the impediments linked to the political context, the characteristics of the associations' actions are mainly explained by the strategic choices of their leaders. On the one hand, the political culture of the associations' leaders makes them focus on particular modes of action. On the other hand, a process of moderation is engaged when movements unite around a consensus and when they start to participate in different levels of government or to manage various services. In the three countries, the majority of groups involved in these radical actions (about thirty in Spain and Brazil, 6 in Argentina) find themselves behind the usual processes of negotiation on public policies with the authorities.

The leaders of associations of parents of intellectually disabled children belong to privileged social and economic classes in the three countries, and have a regular access to negotiations with public authorities. They manage special education services and they receive public grants for this. As a result, they are often unwilling to use radical action and they favor the use of petitions and formal letters if needed. All of these could explain their absence as an actor in the protests in Argentina and in Brazil, and their low presence in Spain (8 actions, meaning 12 % of the total). Only some associations of parents dare to organize street protests, and most of those take place during the information week on intellectual disability. During the second quarter of 1978, as the maintenance of some special education centers is threatened by the lack of regular and sufficient public grants, some parents suggest modifying the register of actions by the Federation of Associations of Parents of the intellectually disabled (FEAPS). They suggest during the annual meeting that the federation should

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<sup>24</sup> Public Archives of the State of São Paulo, DEOPS, Ordem Politico, OP0654, 'Duzentos protestam na Sé', *O Estado de São Paulo*, São Paulo (22/7/80).

<sup>25</sup> 'Manifestaciones de subnormales en Las Palmas', *El País*, without date. In *Voces*, Madrid, 75 (15 de junio 1977).

<sup>26</sup> 'Ni ciegos ni ciudadanos "sub"', *Voces*, Madrid, 86 (15 de junio 1978).

<sup>27</sup> CONADEP, *Nunca Más* (Buenos Aires : UBA, 1986), pp. 341-347.

withdraw from the decision-making bodies, and organize road protests or sit-ins in order to place greater pressure on the administrative authorities.<sup>28</sup> After discussions, this proposal is rejected. The assembly decides, by a majority, to write a manifesto that gives an ultimatum to the authorities.

In the three countries, it is predominantly the physically and sensorily disabled people who choose to radicalize their modes of action. In Spain, among the 66 actions organized during this period, 52 are led mainly by physically disabled people (i.e. 79 %), and 6 by blind people (i.e. 9 %). The administrative authorities, and in particular *Servicio de Recuperación y Rehabilitación de Minusválidos Físicos y Psíquicos* (SEREM), are the main target of the sit-ins and the destination of many protest marches. This kind of street protest can be considered to be uprisings as they 'go straight ahead towards the headquarters of a management authority in order to put it under pressure, but without any assumed violence, to make decisions it did not think about initially'.<sup>29</sup>

The progressive unification of the associations of people with physical disabilities begins at the end of 1976 and determines the increase in the number of street protests and their geographical extension. In 1977, a country-wide coordination of physically disabled people takes place, bringing together several tens of associations. This coordination calls for an unitary day of protest on 24th November 1979, which takes place in eleven cities simultaneously. At the end of 1978, this coordination leads to a majority decision to cooperate with the administrative, decision-making authorities. This brings a more respectful attitude with the authorities and a decrease in the number of sit-ins staged by the involved associations. However, other disabled people are against this strategy of involvement with the administrative bodies, which they consider to be marginalizing and inefficient, and wish for a much more radical movement.<sup>30</sup> The partial meeting of the associations' demands that accompanies the passing of the law for the social integration of disabled people (LISMI) in 1982 leads to a small decrease in the number of actions.

The Brazilian protests strongly differ from those in other countries by their mixed and moderate nature. The slogans shown during protests do not usually contain any direct accusation against administrative authorities, managing associations, or private enterprises. By respecting the established authorities, these street protests are a more general manifestation of social awareness of the issues. They can, then, be categorized as street-processions, that is 'no audience processions whose main function is to build the image of the group by using symbols'.<sup>31</sup>

In 1980, many associations of physically disabled, blind, deaf and leprous people form a national coalition.<sup>32</sup> This coalition calls for an unitary protest day on 21st September 1982, also organized in about seven other cities. This explains the diversity of participants in the protests: 70 % of protestors are physically disabled, blind, and, to a lesser extent, deaf, leprous and sometimes intellectually disabled people accompanied by their caregivers. Despite differences of political orientation, the various organizations succeed in maintaining their unity, through the diplomacy of some of their members and through the majority approval of a moderating consensus on their demands. All of these appear at the protest level through the presence of religious members and also through the support granted by various political, religious, and economical bodies. The Brazilian protests are generally seen from the point of view of the fraternity between social classes, while the Spanish protests are affected by stronger class tensions.

In Argentina, the actions concern both administrative authorities and associations' offices. The actions undertaken by FLP are particularly subversive towards the private associations AOI and COR and the charity ladies who are managing them. Composed of more than one hundred people with physical disabilities, blindness, or hemophilia, FLP is quite isolated from the other associative movements. It does not manage to bring together the other associations of physically disabled people who share an antagonistic political culture or that are already collaborating with administrative bodies. However, in early 1974, leaders do succeed in gathering the associations of deaf, blind, and hemophiliacs in order to form the *Unión Nacional Socioeconómico del Lisiado* (UNSEL). In this

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<sup>28</sup> *Voces*, Madrid, 85 (15 de mayo 1978).

<sup>29</sup> D. Tartakowsky, *Le pouvoir est dans la rue. Crises politiques et manifestations en France* (Paris: Aubier, 1998), p. 43.

<sup>30</sup> 'Asamblea de minusválidos en Madrid', *Hoja Oficial del Lunes*, Madrid, 2028 (27 de febrero 1978).

<sup>31</sup> D. Tartakowsky, *Le pouvoir est dans la rue*, p. 42.

<sup>32</sup> L. Junior and M. Cléber Martins (eds), *Historia do Movimento Político das Pessoas com Deficiência no Brasil* (Brasília : Secretaria Nacional de Promoção dos Direitos da Pessoa com Deficiência, 2010), p. 38.

increasingly tense political context, UNSEL does not take any radical action, but it concentrates its efforts on the process of the drafting of a law by parliament regarding work for disabled people.

Affected to different degrees by the dynamics of political control and strategic moderation, these movements for disability rights take different paths of emancipation depending on each country.

### **3. The different paths of emancipation.**

The entangled analysis of the goals of protests encounters several obstacles. Certain actions are related to local and prosaic goals, while others differ by the emancipatory approach of their objectives. It is unusual when they limit themselves to fight for one single objective. In this case, the comparison is particularly difficult. However, for some their goal is to preserve the existing rights threatened by the authorities' politics. On 13th July 1981, one hundred blind lottery ticket sellers protest in the streets of Seville against the recent law that legalizes the selling of lottery tickets inside bars, and in this way seek to protect the exclusivity reserved for ONCE.<sup>33</sup>

Certain groups of persons with disabilities share their wish for equality and for emancipation from certain care and guidance (medical, familial, administrative, religious) during these protests. Some disagreements exist, however, about the means by which one can achieve this equality and this emancipation. In Spain, there is a particularly strong tension between the promoters of a law concerning the social integration of disabled people, who also support the creation of a coordinating administrative agency, and those who categorically oppose this line, which they see as a differential and marginalizing treatment of disability. This group are also opposed to maintaining some specialized services, such as the sheltered workshops or shared residences. From 1978, the Spanish coordination of physically disabled people supports the first of these two approaches. Protests are organised in about ten cities on 24th November 1979 in order to demand the fast approval of the law on social integration of disabled people currently being reviewed by Parliament. In Brazil and in Argentina, debates oppose the advocates of achieving equal rights for the disabled with those of other citizens, and activists for special rights. The idea of passing a law specifically dedicated to the social integration of disabled people does not create an opposition in principle in these countries.

In each country, the disability rights movements mark the boundaries between the forms of equality they seek to obtain and the situations of inequality and dependence they experience. We will outline the main characteristics now, focussing on three issues in particular: access to properly paid work; accessibility; and emancipation from guardianship.

#### **A. Conquering the right to work.**

In the three countries, the training programs offered to disabled people are quite residual, even people from Brazil are more concerned because of the activity of the Department of Rehabilitation of the *Instituto Nacional da Previdência Social*. Professional training is provided in Spain by the National Association of Civilian Invalids (ANIC) and by other private associations, in collaboration with the SEREM and the Ministry of Labor. In Argentina it is provided by the *Servicio Nacional de Rehabilitación*. In Spain, it is limited to one thousand people each year, while in Argentina to only one hundred disabled people. The major difficulty for those who are rehabilitated in the three countries relates to access to appropriate and properly paid employment. This situation persists in spite of the adoption of legal measures (adopted in Brazil in 1960 and in Spain in 1970) that set aside a certain percentage of posts within some public administrations and private companies for disabled people. When they do manage to obtain employment, it is often precarious and very poorly paid. The crisis of professional opportunities is particularly acute in Spain during the 1970s. In the absence of professional opportunities within the mainstream sector, sheltered workshops become widespread in Spain (mainly under the guidance of ANIC), and in Argentina on the initiative of the private associations AOI and COR. These sheltered workshops are important targets for the Argentinian and Spanish protests. In Spain, several associations ask, during a meeting in February 1977, for the abolition of the private sheltered workshops, and for access to working positions within mainstream

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<sup>33</sup> 'Más de un centenar de ciegos se manifestaron ayer', *ABC*, Sevilla (14 de julio 1981).

companies.<sup>34</sup> However, most attacks are aimed at SEREM's inefficiency, excessive bureaucracy, and lack of resources. In Barcelona, the forty physically disabled people who occupy the buildings of SEREM from 2<sup>nd</sup> November until 6th December 1977 seek the closure of SEREM and the creation of special secretariats in each Ministry.<sup>35</sup> Many actions require the application of the 1970 decree on the reserving of posts for disabled people, as well as the creation of a form of unemployment insurance for all disabled people. In Argentina, the UNSEL advocates for the adoption of a law that would reserve 4% of posts within public administrations and private companies for disabled people. Satisfaction comes quickly: the Parliamentary Assemblies adopt the law *Comisión Nacional de Discapacitados*<sup>36</sup> in October 1974.

## **B. Conquering the right to accessibility.**

In the three countries, although some steps were taken to improve the funding for the purchase of cars with orthopedic control, no measures were taken in order to require architectural transformation of public spaces to improve accessibility. In Spain and in Brazil, the accessibility of public transportation and the city's architecture is one of the main objectives of the protests. In Spain, those engaged are using special means of action to denounce the lack of accessibility to public transportation: the MU organizes some sit-ins in front of the subway of Puerta del Sol in Madrid from 5th March 1976 and 26th November 1977. Following their mobilization, several town councils (Palma de Mallorca, Barcelona, Madrid) introduce measures which are designed to allow their urban mobility and to get rid of the architectural barriers. The mobilized disabled people from Spain mention exclusively the architectural and technical progress of Northern European countries (Sweden, Norway, Finland), while Brazilians refer to the United States' example. In Brazil, some disagreements arise between those associations in favor of free public transportation and those against it because they see it as a privileged and special treatment of disability. In Argentina, the topic of accessibility is not mentioned during the protests. This is explained by the small number of association activists familiar with this issue in 1973.

## **C. The perimeters of emancipation.**

In the three countries, the physically and sensorily disabled people mobilized within the protests agree about the need to fight against paternalism and authoritarianism. They protest against the charitable and compassionate approach to disability and, to a lesser extent, the overprotective attitude of the families. In this way they show their will to master their destiny.<sup>37</sup> Unwilling to be part of the private charity any longer, they ask for the administrative bodies to take care of their needs, but they demand also to participate in the decision-making process with the officials, in order to have a more egalitarian relationship with the administrative bodies. To this end, their representatives attend certain decision-making administrative bodies at a local, regional, or national level. In Spain, a steering committee of SEREM is created, including nine government officials and nine disabled people.

On the contrary, contesting religious teaching seems to be a minority issue in Spain and is almost absent from discourses in Brazil. Furthermore, the will among rehabilitation specialists to impose a more egalitarian relationship is almost absent in Spain. However, in the other two countries, some disabled people themselves rebel against the experience of professional rehabilitation, which completely ignores the choices made by disabled people. In Argentina in August 1974, in its fight against the current understanding of professional rehabilitation, the UNSEL insists that is predominantly managed by private organizations and guided by scientific, paternalist, and charitable criteria. The disabled person is seen as a passive individual by this kind of rehabilitation, which is conceived as a set of actions to be achieved. This does not help her to better integrate into society and

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<sup>34</sup> 'Los minusválidos españoles reivindican su integración en la sociedad', *Empuje*, Barcelona, 7 (marzo 1977).

<sup>35</sup> 'Estar con ...', *Auxilia*, Madrid, 104 (diciembre 1977).

<sup>36</sup> G. Brégain, 'Historiar los derechos a la rehabilitación integral de las personas con discapacidad en Argentina', p. 163.

<sup>37</sup> L. Crespo, 'A gênese do movimento das pessoas com deficiência', in *Secretaria dos Direitos da Pessoa com Deficiência, 30 anos do AIPD* (São Paulo: Imprensa Oficial do Estado de São Paulo, 2011), p. 147.

may even marginalize her further.<sup>38</sup> In Brazil, the *Movimento pelos Direitos das Pessoas Deficientes* denounces the limited technical training of the health and rehabilitation professionals, 'who have inadvertently adopted a position of superiority towards their clients, by not asking for their opinions on their needs and their choices'.<sup>39</sup>

At the same time as the English association UPIAS builds a radically social interpretation of disability, by totally separating it from the impairment, Spanish members of MU doubt the medical definitions of disability. According to one member, we have to see the disabled 'as a social group which is marginalized by society because of (?) its physical and psychical impairments'.<sup>40</sup> The question mark is used here in order to register doubt about 'the fatal cause and effect relationship' between the physical impairment and the marginal situation. That is, the Spanish member wishes to show that a certain physical defect 'does not lead by itself to the social marginalization', as the contemporary capitalist society contributes to the marginalization of disabled people.

#### **D. The experience of new, more egalitarian social relations.**

These periods of protest could be considered as 'moments of potential historical discontinuity' during which the marginalized actors take advantage of historical opportunities in order to build emancipatory utopias and more egalitarian social relations.<sup>41</sup> These actions sometimes lead to the temporary experience of more egalitarian social relations between disabled people and the people who, at a particular moment, come into contact with them. In Barcelona, the forty physically disabled people locked inside the offices of SEREM from 2nd November until 6th December 1977 discuss as equals with the workers from SEREM who join their fight. The borderlines between the social groups are removed; physically disabled people from the educated middle class join those living on the streets. According to Antonio Guillén, one of the disabled leaders, 'the disabled people could live [for] one and a half months a new reality in which their capacity to be useful was recognized'.<sup>42</sup> Many of them will also discover for the first time physical love.

To emancipate themselves from the family and from the institution's teaching, certain disabled people experiment with communal living, without the authority of the family, the administration, or the associations. Or, they may try to live in an individual apartment. The United States model of 'centers for independent living' (CIL) saw a low-level spread into the three countries, during the period in question here. In Argentina in 1982 three severely disabled women, leaders of the Christian fraternity in Buenos Aires, take inspiration from the small booklets written in English about the CIL and create their own community center, the *Hogar Padre François* (HODIF).<sup>43</sup> This center is established in 1983, after the end of dictatorship. In Brazil, certain leaders are aware of the existence of the CIL since the mid-1970s, but the first project for such a center starts in 1988 in Rio de Janeiro. In Spain, during the democratic transition, the matter of shared residences leads to lively debates. The most radical groups demand the termination of shared residences and seek access to individual apartments for severely disabled persons. In Barcelona during the 1980s, several small groups of young physically disabled people decide to live as an autonomous community in several apartments in the *El besos* neighbourhood.<sup>44</sup> There is no evidence that their experience is inspired by that of the CIL.

#### **Conclusion**

This decade (1968-1982) is marked by the radicalization of disability rights movements. The Spanish case differs from those in the other two countries by the higher level of radicalness, seen through the importance and diversity of the number of protests, the high level of conflicts with the police authorities, the importance of conflicts of interpretation regarding the cause of social marginalization of disabled people in the associative debates of 1976-1977, as well as the questioning of religious teaching by different groups. Nevertheless, no questions have been raised over the medical guidance in the process of professional rehabilitation. On the other hand, the Brazilian movements are

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<sup>38</sup> *Diario de Sesiones de la Cámara de Senadores*, Buenos Aires, 12 de septiembre 1974, p. 1847.

<sup>39</sup> *Movimento pelos Direitos das Pessoas Deficientes, Carta Programa*, dezembro de 1980.

<sup>40</sup> Gabinete de Estudios y Asesoramiento, *Minusvalidos Fisicos*, p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> M. Riot-Sarcey, *Le réel de l'utopie. Essai sur le politique au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1998), p. 34.

<sup>42</sup> A. Guillén, 'La participación', p. 65.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Gustavo Bottelli, Buenos Aires, June 18th 2010.

<sup>44</sup> 'El Besos : un barrio para minusvalidos', *En Marcha CEMFE*, Madrid, 5 (abril 1981).

marked by strong moderation of both action and demands, as well as by their taking place between different disabilities.

The entangled perspective allows us to better understand the specificity of protests, by analysing the foreign influences. The results of our research lead us to relativize the originary and the original manner of the Anglo-Saxon protests within the growth of disability rights movements at the international level. To consider western countries as the first protest centers and creators of emancipatory projects for disabled people at an international level means adopting a western-centric point of view. Like Marcel Détienné, we think that it is possible to observe multiple inventions of emancipatory projects within distant societies from a chronological and spatial point of view.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> M. Detienne, *Comparer l'incomparable* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), p. 106.